Pan American Airways System Terminal Building (Miami City Hall, Marina Building)
3500 Pan American Drive
Miami
Dade County
Florida

HABS No. FL-36

P H O T O G R A P H S

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

HABS No. FL-363

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AMERICA'S CITY HALLS

Name: Pan American Airways System Terminal Building (1933-1950)
Marina Building (1950-1954)
Miami City Hall (1954-Present)

Location: 3500 Pan American Drive
Miami, Dade County, Florida

Present Owner: City of Miami
3500 Pan American Drive
Miami, Florida

Present Occupant: City of Miami
3500 Pan American Drive
Miami, Florida

Present Use: City Hall

Significance: At the time of its construction in 1933, the Pan American Airways System Terminal Building at Dinner Key was the largest and most modern marine air terminal in the world. Said to be one of the best planned terminal buildings constructed for either land or marine airports, it was noted for its innovative layout plan for traffic handling and for its scientific design. This design allowed for the simultaneous handling of four airliners, a feature not previously found in air terminals. Often described as the "Air Gateway Between the Americas", Dinner Key was the nation's busiest commercial seaplane terminal.

The facilities at Dinner Key were the first constructed exclusively for commercial passenger seaplane service and served as a model for those that followed in Rio de Janeiro, New York and San Francisco. The construction of the seaplane

base also marked the first time the Congressional Rivers and Harbor Committee approved an appropriation expressly for dredging a navigable channel for airline activity. In addition, the development of Dinner Key marked the first time in aviation history that an airline was granted eminent domain to reserve its rights to the land, thus setting a precedent for land granting procedures for airlines.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of Erection

Construction of the Terminal Building began in 1933, with the official opening on March 25, 1934 (Pan Am General Files). The groundbreaking and dedication for the seaplane base took place on February 21, 1931 (Pan Am General Files).

2. Architect

Architects for the Terminal Building were Delano and Aldrich of New York City (signed plans). The basic design of the building has been attributed to Fred J. Gelhaus, Airport Engineer for the Caribbean Division of the Pan American System, and his Assistant, B. W. Reeser (Aviation, June 1934, p. 170). William Adams Delano and Chester Holmes Aldrich, both graduates of the Ecole des Beaux Arts, organized the firm of Delano and Aldrich in 1903. They specialized in

various revival styles and developed an extensive practice in town and country houses for wealthy clients, principally in the New York City area. They also designed non-residential buildings, particularly for private schools and colleges. Commissions included the original buildings for La Guardia Airport, New York; Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore; Knickerbocker Club, New York; Post Office Department Buildings, Washington, D. C.; and the estate of John D. Rockfeller at Pocantico Hills. Delano and Aldrich also served as consultants on the renovation of the White House in 1949-1952.

3. Builder, Contractor, Suppliers

The general contractor for the Terminal Building was Fred Howland of Miami. A list of many of the suppliers of building components can be found in the attached xeroxed article from The Herald, "Terminal Building Features Are Told," p. 17. Murals were painted by Barnet Phillips.

4. Original Plans and Construction

The Terminal Building was described in 1934 as "Conservatively Modernistic - simple yet very satisfying to the eye," and was said to be "an impressive example of...originality in architectural design and detail." Constructed at a cost of approximately $250,000, the Terminal Building is a two story structure flanked by one story wings. Until the early 1950's,

the building featured a recessed, covered entrance with elaborate bronze doors topped with bronze grilles. Window frames throughout the building were also drawn bronze and were topped with concrete lintels.

The main floor featured a two story lobby, encircled by a balcony. In the center was a 10 foot globe showing the major air routes of the world. Murals depicting the history of aviation decorated the upper portions of the lobby, and signs of the zodiac embellished the ceiling and ceiling beams. At the rear of the lobby was a curved traffic counter. Baggage, traffic, and clearance operations were also located on the first floor, as were immigration, customs, and public health service examination rooms.

The second floor featured a dining room and bar with an open deck overlooking Biscayne Bay. Two promenade decks, surrounding the building, served as observation areas for visitors to view the arrival and departure of planes. The lower floor contained a series of passageways leading to and from the planes.

The location of original plans and early views is included in Part III.

5. Additions and Alterations

Although the basic structure and most of the exterior details of the Terminal Building have not been altered, all windows and doors have been replaced and most of the interior has been changed.

The first major alteration occurred in 1951 after the City of Miami acquired the building. Robert Law Weed and Associates were the architects. At this time, the original recessed facade was extended outward and new doors with awning windows on either side were installed. The original entrance canopy was also replaced with a larger one. Many windows on the east(rear) facade were replaced with awning or fixed plate glass windows, and several doors were closed and/or opened up. Major changes were also made to the interior in order to convert the building to a restaurant.

The Terminal Building was altered again by the City of Miami in 1953 in order to convert the structure to a City Hall. M. M. Vaviloff was the architect. All windows and many doors were changed except those on the second story west (front) facade. The typical new windows were aluminum awning types in banks of 1, 2, 3, and 5 set in precast concrete frames. Major changes were again made to the interior to provide office space. The two story lobby was enclosed at this time.

Other changes have included a one story addition to the east (rear) facade in 1958 and a small addition, also in 1958, on the southeast corner of the building over the second story deck area. The original windows on the second story west (front) facade were also replaced with glass block sometime during this period.

Plans for these alterations are available in the City of Miami Public Works Department (see Part III).

B. Historical Context

Dinner Key, a small island in Biscayne Bay, was joined to the mainland during World War I to provide a training ground for the U. S. Navy. Destroyed by the 1926 hurricane, the site was selected by the newly-formed Pan American Airways System in 1930 as the base for its inter-American operations. The lack of landing facilities for planes in Latin America forced Pan American to utilize flying boats and amphibious aircraft for its operations. Pan American erected its first hangar at Dinner Key in 1931 and used a houseboat as its first passenger terminal.

As air operations expanded, Pan American undertook a $700,000 improvement program at Dinner Key, starting in 1931. A deeper channel, one mile long and 700 feet wide, was dredged, additional land at the base was filledin, and additional hangars were erected. In 1933, construction began on an ultra-modern terminal building.

During the mid 1930's and early 1940's, approximately 50,000 passengers per year flowed through the terminal. In addition, the terminal averaged more than 30,000 visitors per month, with as many as 100,000 in the winter months.

During World War II, Dinner Key again served as a base for the U. S. Navy. In 1943, President Roosevelt arrived at Dinner Key to board a clipper ship for Casablanca. The trip marked the first time a President travelled in an aircraft while in office. The appearance of landing

fields in Latin America during the war decreased the need for seaplanes, and on August 9, 1945, Pan American's last flight to Dinner Key took place.

Dinner Key was purchased by the City of Miami in 1946 for use as a waterfront park. In 1950, the Terminal Building was converted into a restaurant and marina office. In 1954, the building was adapted for use as Miami's City Hall.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. Description of Exterior

The Terminal Building features a two story central block flanked by one story wings. This rectangular structure, with 11 bays across the front facade, measures 167 feet by 114 feet by 54 feet and is topped by a flat roof with parapet. The building is of steel frame construction, reinforced with concrete, and is supported by pilings. Exterior walls are covered with stucco.

A frieze of winged globes and rising suns, connected at the corners by sculptured eagles, encircles the building. The words "Miami City Hall," replacing the original "Pan American Airways System," appear above the main entrance. A beltcourse embellished with circular designs is located above the first story windows and extends outward as a border on the window canopies.

Two of the original covered passageways which led from the lower level to the landing stations still remain intact.

B. Description of Interior

The main entrance of the Terminal Building opens into a new one story lobby, behind which is the original two story lobby and waiting room,

now utilized as Commission Chambers. Although the murals in the lobby have been covered up or painted over, the original clock on the east wall still remains. The ceiling beams are still exposed, although accoustical tile has been placed between them.

The balcony encircling the original lobby is now enclosed and has been divided into numerous offices. Most of the original interior features were removed during the 1950's, and little remains intact today.

C. Site

The Terminal Building, which faces west, is approached by a wide landscaped boulevard which ends in a traffic circle directly in front of the entrance. The building is the center point of a 'V' shaped line of hangars, which originally served as maintenance and machine shops and operation and storage facilities. Two of the largest units, constructed by the Navy during World War II, were joined in 1946 and serve as an auditorium and convention hall. The other hangars are now used for boat storage and repair. The waterfront area surrounding the Terminal Building is now an active marina for more than 300 small boats.

PART III SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings

1. Original Plans

a. "Dinner Key Marine Base - Comprehensive Plan for Development," (blueprint), 1931.
City of Miami Public Works Department, Miami, Florida (file DK 6)

b. "Terminal Building, The Pan American Airways System, Miami, Florida," Delano and Aldrich, architects (blueprint and poor copy), 1933. City of Miami Public Works Department, Miami, Florida (file DK 24).

2. Copies of Original Plans (can be found in the following periodicals)

a. Architecture, April 1935, pp. 196-197. (Partial site plan; lower, first, and second floor plans).

b. Aviation, June 1934, p. 170. (Lower and 1st floor plans).

c. Pan American Air Ways, April 1, 1931, p. 102-103. (Proposed site plan).

3. Copies of Architects Renderings (can be found in the following locations)

a. The Pan American, June 1933, n.p. (Main facade with hangars, lobby, photograph of architects' model).

b. Pan American Corporate Headquarters, New York, New York. Archives Department. (Xeroxed rendering of east (rear) facade).

4. Original Plans for Alterations and Additions (all are located at the City of Miami Public Works Department, Miami, Florida)

a. "Additions and Alterations to Terminal Building for the City of Miami, Dinner Key Marina, Miami, Florida," Robert Law Weed and Associates, Architects, 1951. (file ARCHIT-1-1)

b. "Miami City Hall - Alterations to Marina Building, Dinner Key, City of Miami, Florida," M. M. Vaviloff, Architect, 1953. (file DK-103)

c. "City Hall Second Floor Alterations, 1958, City of Miami, Florida," M. M. Vaviloff, Architect, 1958. (file DK - 135)

d. "City Hall Addition for Expenditure Control and Accounting Division, City of Miami, Florida," M. M. Vaviloff, Architect, 1958 (file DK-150).

e. "City Hall Office Alterations and Additions," George J. Sheldon, Architect, 1974 (not built). (file DK-211)

B. Early Views

Historical Museum of Southern Florida and the Caribbean, Miami, Florida.
Numerous interior and exterior photographs and postcards.

Pan Am Corporate Headquarters, New York, New York. Archives Department. Numerous interior and exterior photographs from 1931 to 1945.

Pan American Southeastern U. S. Office, Miami, Florida
Numerous interior and exterior photographs from 1931 to 1945.

C. Bibliography

1. Primary Sources

Berchtold, William E. "Port of Entry de Luxe." Aviation, June 1934, pp. 168-170.

"Gateway to the Americas." The Pan American, June 1933, n.p.

"Miami Airport," Architecture, Vol 71, No. 4, April 1935, pp. 195-202.

Pan Am Corporate Headquarters, New York, New York. Archives Department. General files related to the history of Dinner Key.

Pan Am Southeastern U.S. Office, Miami, Florida. Public Relations Department. General files related to the history of Dinner Key.

The Herald, Miami, Florida. May 27, 1937, pp. 16-19.

"Work Underway on World's Largest Seaplane Base." Pan American Air Ways, April 1, 1931, pp. 102-103.

2. Secondary Sources

Bukhair, Alexander M. History of the Pan American Clippership Base at Dinner Key, Miami, Florida. Unpublished Thesis, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida, June 1, 1971.

Mikesh, Robert C. "The Clipper Connection." Air Line Pilot, April 1980, pp. 93-96.

National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, U. S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D. C. Nomination Form for Pan American Seaplane Base and Terminal Building, Coconut Grove, Dade County, Florida, 1975.

D. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated

Delano and Aldrich, Architects, New York, New York.

Although the firm is no longer in existence, a nephew of one of the architects may be able to supply information about the location of files. The nephew's name is A. McIlvane, 131 E. 36th Street, New York, New York 10016, (212) 680-4880.

Pan Am Corporate Headquarters, New York, New York or Pan Am Southeastern U. S. Office, Miami, Florida

Files related to the actual construction of the Terminal Building have not yet been located by Pan Am officials. If these files still exist, they should provide a great deal of information not available in the Public Relations files.

E. Supplemental Material

Attached.

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City of Miami
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Miami, Florida
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